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ABSTRACT

Counselor education literature suggests that part of counselor training is personal growth and that counselor education should be dealing with personal issues that may hinder the effectiveness of counselor trainees in a clinical setting. An ongoing discussion of effective interventions has presented a variety of suggestions for intervention by counselor education programs toward this end. One approach has been to mandate personal counseling by trainees. A qualitative study of 13 graduates of the Masters degree counselor training program at a major university was undertaken to find out if the policy of requiring counseling during the program was effective. Evidence is presented to show that the policy was not strictly nor universally enforced. However, most of those who attended counseling found it to be an important part of their development as professional counselors and were able to define personal counseling's contributions. Most of those who had not been required to attend counseling thought that the requirement should exist. Implications and suggestions for further research are discussed. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/MKA)

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A Study of the Outcomes of Required Counseling
During Counselor Training at a CACREP Accredited University

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Abstract

Counselor education literature suggests that part of counselor training is personal growth and that counselor education should be dealing with personal issues that may hinder the effectiveness of counselor trainees in a clinical setting. An ongoing discussion of effective interventions has presented a variety of suggestions for intervention by counselor education programs toward this end. One approach has been to mandate personal counseling by trainees. A qualitative study of thirteen graduates of the Masters Degree counselor training program at a major university was undertaken to find out if the policy of requiring personal counseling during the program was effective. Evidence is presented to show that the policy was not strictly nor universally enforced. However, most of those who attended counseling found it to be an important part of their development as professional counselors and were able to define personal counseling's contributions. Most of those who had not been required to attend counseling thought that the requirement should exist.

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Introduction

There is a significant body of literature that documents, theorizes and measures inappropriate or unproductive behaviors of counselors as well as attributes of the counselor that enhance the process (Kitchener, 1991). However, psychoanalysts are the only professionals consistently dedicated to the belief that counselors should attend counseling as a significant adjunct to training. Recently, this subject has emerged in other counseling literature.

An early premise of psychoanalysis was that all psychoanalytic students must complete psychoanalysis before being licensed as a psychoanalyst. The justification is state clearly in the text discussion of psychoanalytic theory (Slavin & Kriegman, 1992, p. 22), "Ultimately, one of the major ways in which therapists fail their patients revolves around the therapists' use of self-deceptive strategies for protecting or enhancing his or her interests (identity) in a fashion that is cast in terms of the interests of the patient." One of the identified problems discovered in a study by Poidevant (1991) reinforces this theoretic construct. Poidevant found that a significant problem for individuals entering the counseling profession was professional identity. The countertransference process of seeking identity through the client haunts the counseling profession in some significant ways. Shimberg (1987) was more blunt when he stated that therapists with compulsive or narcissistic disorder are "offenders," casting them as virtually criminal in intent.

During the formation of a training model for counselors, Aponte (1994) identified a significant countertransference issue as the potential abuse of power, an element intrinsic to influence. In a self-report survey of licensed psychologists, 30% of responding therapists reported having had sexual contact with clients (Pope, Levinson, & Schoner, 1979). Kitchener (1991) wrote that sensitivity to ethical issues, honing ethical decision-making, being willing to place value on ethical behavior and developing ego strength to carry out ethical decisions were needs for counselors. Childs (1987) decried the lack of training in ethics for counselors, and Wynn (1987) described ethical training as the crucial issue in successful education of counselors.

Pope and associates (1979) and later Glaser and Thorpe (1986) empirically tested these hypotheses and found that counselors who had sexual contact with professors and supervisors during academic years were 9 times as likely to have

sexual contact with clients than those who had not had sexual contact with teaching staff. Downs (2000) also discovered in a survey of counselor educators, that, without adequate and extensive ethics training, supervision and self exploration, ethical response to dilemmas as clinicians, supervisors and instructors of counseling tends to be based on fear of being caught or being censored by colleagues. Counseling professionals with extensive self evaluation show higher moral reasoning for ethical decision-making.

So, students learn inappropriate behaviors readily during training; but, if the ethical boundary of instructors was solidified, would it not be enough to teach skills? In other words, is it important to deal with personal issues to become a good ethical counselor? Wynn (1987) studied this question in a pastoral counseling setting and pointed out that skills training was not the most crucial element in forming a effective counselor. The evidence that spontaneous remission on the part of a client living in a healthy environment and the equal effectiveness of some lay counselors to that of trained counselors suggested to Wynn some untrained qualities. His discovery was that two prime elements of quality were the personality and ethics of the counselor.

Again, an astute discussion of psychoanalytic theory stated, "The concept of neutrality is rooted in the perspective that tends to assume that for a well-analyzed therapist, significant elements of bias and deception will not be an intrinsic part of the therapeutic relationship (Slavin & Kriegman, 1992, p. 24)." How does the concept hold up under empirical testing? A study by Breiner (1990) lends evidence that psychoanalysts, given the task of evaluating other physicians for psychological impairments, were significantly more objective than other psychiatrists.

Marriage and family counselor have echoed this theme, instituting training programs that encourage personal counseling during training and even openly relating personal discoveries from therapy back into counselor-client relations study in the classroom (Aponte, 1994).

Further, counselor education itself has taken up the issue both theoretically and empirically. The basis appears to be the same concern for a solid ethical base of clinical practice. Potential interrelational problems with professional response to dilemmas have been discussed at length. There has been a significant discussion of

counselor development for development of training guidelines and standards (ACA, 1995; CACREP, 1994; Kurpius, Gibson, Lewis, & Corbet, 1991; Ryder & Hepworth, 1990; Dye, & Borders, 1990; Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Gold, & Unerod, 1988; Pope, Levenson, & Schoner, 1979; Bernard, 1987; Gilbert, 1987) in professional ranks. However, little evidence has been compiled to document the progress of these endeavors nor the state of ethical practice and teaching in Counselor Education.

The empirical data suggest that impaired counseling students exist in programs. A study of counselor training programs considered these concerns and measured counseling program tools of response, discovering that most counseling programs did not screen nor have procedures to deal with impaired students (Bradey & Post, 1991). Bemak and associates (1999) followed up recently and discovered a continuing difficulty addressing issues of student personal growth. Another study found problems within the ranks of counselor educators themselves. Inappropriate relationships between counseling instructors and graduate counseling students were documented (Milde, 1995).

Supervision literature has suggested models for inclusion of therapeutic intervention in the training process. Wise, Lowery and Silverglade (1989) developed the concept for more universal implementation by analyzing the stages of counselor training and suggesting different personal therapeutic modalities for each stage of professional development. However, the trend in counselor education is toward personal growth being relegated to a therapeutic arena outside of the training program (Hart, 1982; Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Liddle, Wampler & Strupp, 1976).

One method of intervention has been mandated counseling for all counselor trainees. An early study reported that 67% of APA accredited programs encouraged counseling for students but only 4% required it. There is no current study to suggest the trend but some counseling programs do require all students to seek counseling during their training.

Students who attend the counselor training at a program for a Master's Degree at a major university are required to produce proof of participation in a minimum of 10 hours of personal counseling during their tenure at the University by policy of the department. The intent of the department is to encourage students to deal with personal issues which may impair the counseling process and to implant a deeper

belief in and dedication to the counseling process itself and its positive nature. A study was undertaken to discuss the results with graduates of the program.

Methodology

A qualitative study was designed to test this question. A list of graduates of the counseling program over a four year period, which contained 97 names was provided by the counseling program. A random list of thirty graduates was chosen from the original list. A personal interview was conducted with each individual who could be contacted. Of the thirty random names, seven individuals no longer lived at their stated addresses, six people were not available after several attempts to contact them, four people declined to be interviewed and thirteen people responded to the survey.

Questions were structured to discover the quality of counseling received, whether it enhanced the training experience and if so what was gained. Since, attendance in counseling is required for graduation from the program, it had not been anticipated that some students would state that they had not attended counseling. Thus, the need arose to add questions delineating whether counseling had been attended and reasons if not.

Results

Of the 13 people interviewed, four stated that they did not attend counseling. Three of these counselors stated that they were not informed of the requirement to attend, and one stated that he was required but did not attend and that attendance was not checked. One (8%) other interviewee stated that she was never required to attend counseling but did while in the program, anyway. Eight participants stated that they were required and that they had completed the counseling requirement.

Sixty-one percent of the graduates polled attended counseling during the program, while 8% claimed to have evaded the requirement. Thirty-one percent stated that they were not required to attend counseling.

Ten graduates (77%) stated that they thought required counseling was a good idea, two participants (15%) thought it to be unnecessary and one graduate (8%) had no opinion. Three participants (23%) stated that they did not need counseling during the program. One of these felt that he has never needed counseling. Nine individuals (69%) stated that counseling was needed or quite helpful during their counselor training. One person (8%) had no opinion.

Of the graduates that attended counseling, two stated that they were displeased with the counseling they had attended. One felt that restrictions on kind of counseling allowed by the program and lack of availability of money made the experience less than effective. The other felt that the counselor she chose was not a good match. Two participants felt that the counseling they received was adequate, but of no effect on them or their present practice. Both of these interviewees had attended extensive counseling before entering the program and felt that this minimized the effectiveness or applicability of the counseling attended during the program. One interviewee stated that he had attended counseling but could not remember anything about it.

Two of the graduates stated that they had learned boundaries from their experience in the required counseling. One of these stated that she decided to continue counseling based upon her experience in the required counseling. She stated that she learned "how to grow" and learned tolerance as well as "how to be a counselor." The other stated that she learned how to run a group and was taught insight during her tenure in counseling.

Another student stated that she too learned how to run a group from her experience in counseling. She also recalled, "I remember how it feels to be a client, to be in pain." One interviewee answered that she gained objectivity through her experience and still finds it true that she needs counseling for objectivity and to take care of herself. Another interviewee expressed the opinion that counseling was important during the program and remains so because "it's critical with today's society."

Discussion

One unexpected result of the survey was that 31% of the graduates polled believed that they were not required to attend counseling. A followup interview with a professor was conducted. He stated that the development of the requirement as first a suggestion, then, in 1991, a verbally stated requirement. As of 1992, the requirement was written, and by 1993, an agreement was signed by all students to attend counseling. Analysis of the dates of graduation and entrance into the program shows that some of those who were not aware of the requirement entered the program after it was a program policy requirement but before students had to sign an agreement. Two

other professors stated that they do not consistently check to make sure the proof of attendance is in the files before graduation.

One trend that was apparent was that those who attended counseling, whether because of requirements or not, discussed a need for counseling during the program, even if they personally did not see the counseling they had received as valuable or needed.

Although those who did not attend counseling because they were not required generally agreed that the requirement should be in place, these alumni tended to identify less personal need for counseling both during the program and afterwards. The student who had evaded the requirement saw no reason for the requirement, stated that he had not needed counseling during his program, and, interestingly, is an unlicensed private practitioner who has practiced without supervision until licensure became required to collect third-party payment. Only at that point did he seek supervision from, "A gal, because she won't get in my way. She's wonderful for that."

A poll of program alumni was made available, and it was discovered that a significant majority of polled graduates stated that they not only agreed with the requirement but thought it was an important activity during counselor training.

Although the *n* was small for this study and, thus, probably not representative of the entire counseling program graduates' experience or attitudes, issues of import were discussed by those who found the counseling experience valuable. There were, first of all, direct skills applications to the later professional practice. Learning boundaries, empathy, group skills, objectivity and ability to gain insight were valuable contributions when considering the attributes necessary as a counselor.

Coping with the stressors of the counseling training, and for some later life experiences, and working toward resolution of personal issues that might detract from professional practice was an stated agenda that also showed a pattern. Learning to grow, tolerance, caring for self and dealing with modern life stressors were identified as contributions of the counseling to general life quality.

Conclusions

A confirmation of attitudes reflected in literature was present in the results of this study. The literature suggests that personal issues dealt with poorly or not at all (Glaser & Thorpe, 1986) result in a lack of quality in professional practice. The student

who evaded required counseling exhibited a distinctly poor attitude toward feedback and a lack appreciation for the counseling process. Of those who attended, none voiced resentment toward the requirement, and even those who saw no value in the counseling stated that previous counseling had been productive. Attitudes of those required to attend were generally higher toward the requirement than those not required. Those having met requirements were also more likely to revisit counseling. Even graduates who had a negative experience with counseling while in training expressed no doubts toward the requirement. It could be surmised, then, that required counseling during counselor training is a positive influence on the trainee and on her or his later professional practice.

Another issue becomes important for consideration. Since there is evidence that resolution of personal issues during training has a positive effect on later practice, and since polled counseling graduates generally believe that there is value in required counseling during the program, the inconsistency in administering and enforcing the policy is curious. It seems that enforcement of such a policy, in light of both the literature and the findings of this study should be consistent if not universal. It also seems that the general lack of attention that was paid to this productive adjunct to counselor training by the educational institution is inconsistent with data available to suggest the potential of this approach for counselor education.

A study that gathers data from a larger population and that is conducted after there is data available on students who signed the agreement to required counseling, comparing cohorts one to the other, might prove to be more representative and would suggest more validity of the findings. A comparison of outcome studies of different models requiring or emphasizing the need for counseling during training might also be valuable.

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